

teriologist as correct,—and I had a hunch the moment Dr. Rance asked about the cough that it would be something of the sort,—the horns of my dilemma were needle-pointed. Braithwaite insisted I should leave at once for the West, bluntly telling me that even then there was a minimum of hope for recovery.

To go meant the loss of all I possessed, and the practically certain ruin of the structure I had planned, of which the foundation was already laid. I had lost faith in Norris, and Tom Carroll, dear old chap, was utterly incompetent. With all sorts of difficulties besetting it, the carrying to a successful conclusion of the Acme S. & S. was a task mightily worth while. It was too big a thing to give up, and I quickly concluded that if I was to go it would be in the harness, making the best fight I knew how.

Of course I couldn't give Dr. Braithwaite my reasons. All told, he had some thirty thousand dollars invested with us. Again, I doubt if I should have been content to accept exile as the price of life. I have always been a firm believer in fighting for the mastery of a situation, or going down honorably beaten. Compromise, the almost universal shibboleth of modern business, was entirely without my mental ken.

So Braithwaite didn't understand, and much to my surprise he did wash his hands of me, just as he said he would.

**M**Y fever did not lessen as the days passed; but I stuck to my work—although, after the night sweats began, I became so weak that to walk the one block from my rooms to the streetcar was about all I could manage. This was in June. A little later Providence or Fate sent into my office, looking for work, a great, gentle, blue-eyed giant of a Swede, John Langstak. He spoke fair English, had been a sort of trained nurse in some Swedish hospital; he was broke, and seeking any sort of work from door to door. I engaged him on the spot, thus solving the problem of nursing and attendance.

I am not going to enter into the intimate details of my physical suffering during the months that followed. The incidents necessary to mention are sufficiently harrowing. My temperature would fluctuate morning, noon, and night; but it rarely fell below one hundred and two. After the second month I began to have frequent attacks of blindness lasting from ten minutes to an hour, the result of the fever's action on the optic nerve.

Braithwaite did not altogether desert me; for just about the time food became an almost impossible thing Carroll, who was worried to distraction over my condition, brought a characteristic message from him.

"Tell that insane partner of yours," he told Tom, "that a diet of olive oil and milk will possibly prolong his suffering for awhile."

I followed the advice. Milk in some form and half a pint of olive oil twice a day became my only food. The oil coated my intestines and soothed the shriveling fire of pain from which I suffered so intensely.

By the first of July most of the Acme bonds were subscribed. I had purchased the coal lands, arranged for the entire output of several lead mines in which we had an interest, and let the contract for building the smelter and iron foundry.

I had won over a number of influential plumbers, and through them kept fairly well informed regarding the reception of my propaganda.

The two big Middle Western supply houses controlled by the trust were now fully cognizant of my work; but they looked upon it with contempt,—the vagary of a disordered mind, or shrewd scheme of a lead speculator. I was never able to discover which. As their view saved me from what might have been dangerous opposition, I was well content with either construction.

To secure the united support of the plumbers of the Middle West was my greatest difficulty. They did not know me. Slow thinking men as a rule, unversed in much outside their trade, they could not understand why Norris, Carroll & Craig should be interested in their welfare. Their attitude, with few exceptions, was that it was too good to be true; and they couldn't afford to gamble with the wrath of their present source of supplies. Of course I knew that in the last analysis the matter would rest on the action of the union. I wasn't ready for that yet. When I went before that body it would be with all the "ifs" and "ands" absolutely cut out of the proposition, and the plumbers thoroughly educated to what I had to offer.

In some ways ill health was of value to me. The men

I had employed to aid me, and our office force, seemed to be imbued with something of admiration for the man who wouldn't give up. Miss Moore, my secretary, came to the office at seven every morning, so that all correspondence could be ready for me. Even Carroll, under stress of circumstance, developed unexpected business acumen and aided me in many things.

**T**HIS Fourth of July came very near putting an end to it all. The holiday fell on Friday; so we gave our employees a vacation until the following Monday.

Left without the stimulus of my daily work, my nerves suffering from the ceaseless racket of celebrating youngsters, I began to fail pretty rapidly Friday afternoon. Langstak grew alarmed, and leaving me long enough to telephone summoned Carroll and Dr. Braithwaite. When they arrived, almost together, my temperature had mounted to nearly one hundred and five, and I was experiencing the peculiar sensation of being delirious and conscious at the same time. I would lose my grip, slip into delirium, and listen to my own meaningless chatter; then with a great effort regain control of my mind.

Already blind, the voices of my friends sounded faintly in the distance when they spoke. I heard Braithwaite speak sharply to me several times. I heard the words; but the voice sounded so distant that I felt it useless to essay a reply. Besides, I was tired, rather comfortable, and wanted to be let alone.

But the insistent question, "Craig, can you hear me?" dinged-donged away, and I finally answered.

"Can you understand what I'm saying?" came sharply across the distance.

"Yes."

"Then listen to me, my boy. Tom Carroll is here!" I felt a hand steal tremblingly over mine, and knew it was Tom's. "He wants to know if you have anything to say to him. Try to tell him if you have; for—" Gruff as Braithwaite was by nature, he hesitated, and did not finish.

I understood. Only one thought came to me,—that

known to medicine. By midnight my temperature had fallen, and I slept.

Monday afternoon, against Braithwaite's infuriated protest, Langstak carried me to a cab, and I drove to my office.

Carroll had received a letter from Norris, advising that he had been called hurriedly East on personal business. He also expressed a hope for my recovery.

I was not interested, beyond a feeling of relief, as our president had been only a source of worry and perplexity to me of late. I had grown suspicious of his many consecutive failures, and while I hated myself for it the thought would not down that so shrewd a judge of men and mines must have found profit in failure in some way. I kept my thought to myself; for it was evident that Carroll did not share my opinion.

**A** DAY or so later a card was handed me by Miss Moore. "John M. Cottle, M. D." it read, and scribbled on it, "By suggestion of Dr. Myron Braithwaite."

I smiled. Evidently Braithwaite found it harder to throw over his obstinate friend than he anticipated.

Dr. Cottle wasted no time in preliminaries. A keen-eyed, hatchet-faced man, his voice was as sharp as his features.

"Don't waste your strength, Mr. Craig," he interrupted my greeting. "I'll do the talking. Braithwaite's been telling me about your case. He thinks you're crazy. I differ with him. Beyond that, I have an ulterior motive in my interest. Briefly, I believe I have discovered a solution, harmless in its properties, that will keep life in anything that can still breathe for an as yet undetermined period. My experiments upon the lower animals have been highly satisfactory; but I am anxious for an extreme test on a difficult human case."

I grinned. "And you want me to be the goat?"

He looked at me unsmilingly. "Slang, I presume, meaning that I desire you as a subject for experiment. Precisely. You want to continue your work, even at the cost of your life. Very well. I want to demonstrate, if possible, just how far my solution will carry you."

"I see. Then you do not expect to cure me. You don't think it's really the elixir of life you've unearthed?"

Dr. Cottle's sense of humor had evidently atrophied from disease. "Most certainly not!" he replied sharply. "The solution, so far as I am aware, possesses no curative properties whatever, unless keeping life in the body and giving Nature a last chance could be so classed. My process is merely the injection into the body of certain combined elements which I have reason to believe will artificially increase your vitality for an undetermined period, as I have stated."

Naturally I was deeply interested. I looked up Cottle, found him known as an eccentric medical experimentalist, with a good reputation and the credit for some rather remarkable discoveries.

"I've decided to gamble a little with you, Doctor," I told him at our next meeting. "This is July 10. I'll bet you five thousand dollars I am not alive six months from today. The money is to be deposited subject to your check if I am alive on January 10 next. Meanwhile I will defray your actual traveling expense whenever, in your judgment, it is necessary for you to accompany me on any trips I may make. You are not to interfere with my work in any way. You may suggest the inadvisability of any action, and give your reason if I desire it, but without argument. Do you care to accept these conditions?"

Cottle's black eyes sparkled. "I certainly do. In all probability you will die within the month; but it will be an ideal extreme test. If I manage to carry you through six months, the virtue of the solution will be indubitably established. I shall ask you to live at my house. It will be better for us both." He produced a hypodermic syringe with a two-inch gold needle, and a small, squat, round bottle. "You will take your first injection at once," he announced.

The only place on my emaciated body suitable for his purpose was my thigh. Here he injected six drops of the fluid, which he informed me cost him fifty dollars an ounce to prepare.

Langstak and I immediately took up our residence in the very comfortable home of the physician.

I wasn't a very inspiring sight. Almost literally a skeleton, at that time I weighed one hundred and eight

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There was something in her voice that irritated me, and I looked up quickly for an explanation.



I did not want to die on my back like an overturned turtle, and I managed to voice it.

"That's nonsense!" muttered Braithwaite. "He's going to die; but that's just plain killing him!"

"Den i kill heem!" exclaimed Langstak in a low boom. "I love heem. He die lak he want."

Taking me gently in his arms, my giant Swede carried me out on a little gallery overlooking a garden behind the house, and placed me in a cushioned chair. It may have been a last, faint spirit of bravado, or a real desire, but I wanted a cigarette. Moving my thumb slowly across the tips of my fingers, I made the motion of rolling one. Langstak understood. He placed a lighted cigarette between my fingers; but I couldn't raise it to my lips.

"Here, Langstak!" Braithwaite had hastily scribbled a prescription. "Get that filled quick! Maybe it and his infernal nerve will pull him through this."

Five minutes later, at three-minute intervals, they were giving me the most powerful heart stimulant